

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1281

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BUKAVU POUCH

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LUBUMBASHI

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KINSHASA 8481

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ECIN, ECTN, CG, ZA, AO, SA, RH

SUBJECT: OPENING OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD - EFFECTS ON THE ZAIRIAN
ECONOMY

REF: LUBUMBASHI 0913

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH COMMONLY THOUGHT OF AS A PRIMARY EXPORT ROUTE FOR ZAIRIAN AND ZAMBIAN COPPER, THE RE-OPENING OF THE BENEGUELA RAILROAD WOULD PROVIDE MORE OF A BOOST TO ZAIRE'S ECONOMY IN OTHER AREAS. WHILE THE RAILROAD WOULD PROVIDE A QUICKER MEANS OF EVACUATING

ZAIRE'S COPPER, IT ALSO COULD PROVIDE AN ECONOMICALLY FEASIBLE ROUTE FOR EVACUATION OF ZAIRE'S MANGANESE STOCKPILE, AS WELL AS A FASTER, LESS POLITICALLY EMBARRASSING, AND POSSIBLY CHEAPER CONDUIT FOR SHABA'S

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IMPORTS. IN ADDITION, FREEING OF THE ZAIRIAN RAILROAD CARS TRAPPED IN

ANGOLA FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS, WOULD PROVIDE ZAIRE WITH MUCH NEEDED ADDITIONAL ROLLING STOCK. THE HARD CURRENCY REVENUE FROM ZAMBIAN TRANSIT PAYMENTS WOULD ALSO BE A SMALL BUT WELCOME ADDITION TO ZAIRE'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RECEIPTS. ALL THESE BENEFITS, HOWEVER, ARE CONJECTURAL AND WOULD TAKE AT LEAST SEVERAL MONTHS TO MATERIALIZE.

THEY ARE HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON CONTINUED POLITICAL STABILITY IN BOTH ZAIRE AND ANGOLA AS WELL AS ON THE CONTINUED EFFICIENT OPERATION OF THE PORT OF LOBITO, HOWEVER, THE MOST IMPORTANT VARIABLE IS ANGOLA'S ABILITY TO KEEP THE RAILROAD MOVING IN THE FACE OF UNITA'S MILITARY OPERATIONS.
END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE WAKE OF RECENT SPECULATION ON THE POSSIBLE REOPENING OF THE BENEGUELA RAILROAD, A FEW COMMENTS ON THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE BENEGUELA TO ZAIRE APPEAR TO BE IN ORDER. THE MAJOR TRANSIT ROUTES FOR SHABAN EXPORTS ARE 1) THE RAIL/WATER LINK THROUGH ZAIRE TO THE PORT OF MATADI (VOIE NATIONALE), 2) THE OVERLAND ROUTE THROUGH ZAMBIA, RHODESIA, AND SOUTH AFRICA, 3) THE WATER/RAIL AND OVERLAND ROUTES TO DAR ES SALAAM. ALTHOUGH USE OF THE TAZARA RAILROAD IS A THEORETICAL POSSIBILITY, ZAMBIA HAS PREVIOUSLY BLOCKED ZAIRIAN ACCESS, CLAIMING LACK OF CAPACITY. THE 3 MAIN ROUTES CARRY RESPECTIVELY 47 PERCENT, 40 PERCENT, AND 13 PERCENT OF GECAMINES (GC.) COPPER

PRODUCTION. SODIMIZA COPPER CONCENTRATE IS ALL SENT THROUGH SOUTH AFRICA, AS IS GCM CADMIUM. COBALT IS HANDLED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH MATADI, AND ZINC IS SPLIT BETWEEN MATADI AND DAR ES SALAAM. ALTHOUGH COMMONLY THOUGHT OF AS A MAJOR AND EFFICIENT EXPORT ROUTE FOR ZAIRIAN COPPER, IN FACT THE BENEGUELA RAILROAD AT PEAK CARRIED ONLY ONE-THIRD OF ZAIRE'S COPPER EXPORTS AND WAS USED MAINLY AS AN ALTERNATE EVACUATION ROUTE DURING THE DRY SEASON. MOST OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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COPPER CARRIED OVER THE BENGUELA WAS IN THE FORM OF BULKY, RELATIVELY

LOW VALUE CONCENTRATES WHICH ARE POROUS AND REQUIRE SPECIAL HANDLING AND STORAGE FACILITIES. THE MAJOR MATERIALS MOVED VIA THE BENGUELA PRIOR TO ITS CLOSURE IN AUGUST 1975 WERE MANGANESE, COBALT, AND ZINC. EVEN IN 1976 WHEN REOPENING OF THE LINE APPEARED IMMINENT BOTH GECAMINES AND SODIMIZA VIEWED THE PROSPECT AS FAR AS MORE IMPORTANT FROM THE IMPORT THAN THE EXPORT STANDPOINT. NOW THAT LONG-TERM CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED WITH SOUTH AFRICAN AND RHODESIAN TRANSPORT COMPANIES AND SUPPLIERS, AND WITH THE ZAIRIAN NATIONAL RAIL LINE AS WELL, IT IS ALL THE MORE UNLIKELY THAT EITHER COMPANY COULD QUICKLY SHIFT DRAMATIC AMOUNTS OF COPPER EXPORTS FROM THESE ROUTES TO THE BENGUELA EVEN IF THEY SO WISHED. ANY COPPER THAT IS DIVERTED TO THE BENGUELA IS MORE LIKELY TO COME FROM THE OVER-TAXED KIGOMA-DAR ES SALAAM ROUTE. COBALT EVACUATION HAS SUCCESSFULLY SHIFTED TO THE VOIE NATIONALE, LEAVING ONLY MANGANESE AND ZINC THE IMMEDIATE POTENTIAL USERS OF THE BENGUELA. HOWEVER, THE

TIME ADVANTAGE INHERENT IN USE OF THE BENGUELA - A 15 DAY TURNAROUND TIME VERSUS 3 MONTHS ON THE VOIE NATIONALE AND THE SOUTHERN ROUTE - IS SUCH THAT GECAMINES AND SODIMIZA MIGHT AS WELL MOVE TO SHIFT COPPER

AND OTHER MINERALS TO THE LINE AS SOON AS FEASIBLE. THE TIME FACTOR BECOMES PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR GECAMINES, AS THEY ARE PAID A SIZABLE PORTION OF THE MINERAL'S SELLING PRICE ON EMBARKATION OF THE PRODUCT AT AN AFRICAN PORT.

3. NONETHELESS, THE PROBABLE INITIAL "TEST SHIPMENTS" FROM SHABA TO LOBITO WILL BE FROM THE OVER 500,000 METRIC TON MANGANESE ORE STOCKPILE WHICH HAS SPRUNG UP IN SHABA SINCE THE RAILROAD'S CLOSURE. MANGANESE ORE, LIKE COPPER CONCENTRATE, IS AN EXTREMELY BULKY CARGO. UNLIKE COPPER CONCENTRATE, IT IS ALSO VERY LOW IN VALUE. ZAIRIAN MANGANESE ORE, WHICH CONTAINS BETWEEN 33 AND 52 PERCENT MANGANESE, WAS WORTH ABOUT 60 DOLLARS PER METRIC TON IN 1975. COPPER CONCENTRATE AT THE SAME PERIOD WAS WORTH CLOSER TO 450 DOLLARS PER METRIC TON. AT PRESENT ZAIRIAN MANGANESE IS WORTH ABOUT 70 DOLLARS PER
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METRIC TON, AND IN THE ABSENCE OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD, REMAINS UNECONOMIC TO SHIP. THE COST OF TRANSPORTING IT THROUGH SOUTH AFRICA IS ROUGHLY TWICE THE COST OF THE OLD BENGUELA ROUTE AND THE VOIE NATIONALE, IN PARTICULAR MATADI PORT, IS NOT EQUIPPED TO HANDLE THIS TYPE OF CARGO. BECAUSE OF ITS LOW VALUE, THE ORE WOULD PROVIDE THE PERFECT TEST SHIPMENT FOR ZAIRE OVER A REOPENED BENGUELA RAILROAD. IF THE LINE SHOULD NOT BE SECURE, OR THE DELAYS ENCOUNTERED AT LOBITO PORT TOO GREAT, THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE LOSS TO ZAIRE WOULD BE RELATIVELY SMALL. LOSS OF AN ENTIRE TRAINLOAD, OR ROUGHLY 1,200 TONS OF ORE, WOULD ENTAIL A FOREIGN EXCHANGE LOSS TO ZAIRE OF ONLY ABOUT \$85,000. IN ADDITION, FREIGHT CHARGES ON THE BENGUELA HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN CALCULATED ON THE VALUE, RATHER THAN THE WEIGHT OR BULK OF THE CARGO. ASSUMING CONTINUATION ON FREIGHT CHARGES FOR LOST OR DELAYED MANGANESE SHIPMENTS
WOULD ALSO BE SMALL. IF NO DIFFICULTIES ARE ENCOUNTERED ON THE LINE, THEN THE GOZ WOULD BENEFIT NOT ONLY FROM THE ACTUAL EXPORT OF THE MANGANESE, BUT FROM THE RETURN OF AN EFFICIENT ALTERNATE SUPPLY ROUTE INTO SHABA. THIS WOULD BE A SPECIAL BLESSING TO SMK, THE MANGANESE PRODUCERS, WHO HAVE BEEN OUT OF OPERATION SINCE SHABA I

IN MARCH 1977. IT WOULD PROVIDE THEM WITH A SWIFT AND RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVE MEANS OF BRINGING IN THE EQUIPMENT NECESSARY TO PUT THE MINES BACK IN ORDER, AND ALTHOUGH THIS IN ITSELF WOULD NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF REPLACING THE LOCAL WORKERS CAPTURED BY THE INVADERS DURING SHABA I.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KINSHASA 8481

4. THE OPTIONS THAT A RESTORED BENGUELA RAILROAD COULD OPEN FOR SHABAN MINING ENTERPRISES AND THE SHABA ECONOMY AS A WHOLE ARE MOST STRIKING IN THE IMPORTS AREA. CURRENTLY SHABA IS DEPENDENT ON RHODESIA FOR COAL AND COKE FOR ITS MINING SECTOR AND CORN TO FEED ITS POPULACE. IN ADDITION, MANY OF SHABA'S IMPORTED FOOD-STUFFS COME FROM SOUTH AFRICA. WHILE THESE SOURCES ARE PRESENTLY CHEAPER THAN US OR EUROPEAN PROCUREMENT, ESPECIALLY WHEN LOSS AND PILFERAGE OVER THE VOIE NATIONALE ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT, THEY ARE NOT AS SECURE AND THEORETICALLY ARE POLITICALLY LESS DESIRABLE. INCREASED GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN RHODESIA CAN SHUT DOWN THE SOUTHERN ROUTE AT ANY TIME, AS COULD THE ERUPTION OF VIOLENCE WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA. ZAIRE MUST ALSO LIVE WITH THE INCREASINGLY UNPALATABLE FACT THAT ZAMBIA CAN AT ANY TIME AND FOR ANY REASON CUT OFF ACCESS TO RHODESIAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN GOODS BY CLOSING THE BORDER WITH RHODESIA. THE KIGOMA-DAR ES SALAAM ROUTE AND THE VOIE NATIONALE ARE PRESENTLY BEING USED TO THEIR MAXIMUM
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FEASIBLE CAPACITY AND CAN NOT PROVIDE A SAFETY VALVE IN THE EVENT OF SUCH A CLOSURE. WHILE IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE DESIRABLE TO SHIFT AWAY FROM USE OF SUCH A POTENTIALLY UNRELIABLE SUPPLY ROUTE, IT IS NONETHELESS UNLIKELY THAT MUCH OF SHABA'S IMPORT TRAFFIC WOULD BE ABLE TO SWITCH TO THE BENGUELA UNTIL ZAIRE'S OVERALL ECONOMIC SITUATION SHOWS SOME IMPROVEMENT. FOR THEIR OWN POLITICAL REASONS, BOTH SOUTH

AFRICA AND ROHDESIA HAVE BEEN WILLING TO PROVIDE ZAIRE WITH RELA-

EASY CREDIT TERMS ON WHICH TO PURCHASE THE IMPORTS NEEDED TO KEEP SHABA'S MINING ENTERPRISES RUNNING. EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN SUPPLIERS HAVE ALREADY SHOWN THEMSELVES UNWILLING TO SHIP ANY TYPE OF GOODS WITHOUT CONFIRMED LETTERS OF CREDIT, AND ARE UNLIKELY TO CHANGE THIS STAND UNTIL ZAIRE'S FINANCIAL SITUATION AND CREDIT WORTHINESS IMPROVE.

WHILE GECAMINES AND OTHER SHABAN IMPORTERS MAY WISH TO SWITCH TO USE OF THE BENGUELA, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE TIME SAVINGS INVOLVED,

THE FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS MAY WELL FORCE THEM TO CONTINUE TO USE THE SOUTHERN ROUTE UNTIL AND UNLESS IT IS FORCIBLY CLOSED. AT THAT TIME THEY WOULD HAVE TO SWITCH TO THE BENGUELA, BUT IT WOULD BE COSTLY TRANSITION, AND COULD TAKE AS LONG AS SIX MONTHS BEFORE A REGULAR FLOW OF GOODS INTO SHABA COULD BE ESTABLISHED. GIVEN THE LOW STATE OF, GECAMINES' STOCKS OF COAL AND EXPLOSIVES FOR EXAMPLE, THIS COULD RESULT IN MAJOR DISRUPTIONS IN THE MINING INDUSTRY.

5. NONETHELESS, REOPENING THE BENGUELA RAILROAD COULD LESSEN SOMEWHAT ZAIRE'S TRANSPORT DEPENDENCE ON ZAMBIA BY PROVIDING ZAIRE WITH THE RETURN OF THE 600 RAILCARS THAT WERE BLOCKED IN ANGOLA AT THE TIME OF THE RAILROAD'S CLOSURE, EXPANDING ZAIRE'S AGING ROLLING STOCK CAPACITY AND PROVIDING ONE LESS BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN ZAIRE AND ZAMBIA. ZAMBIA WOULD ALSO REGAIN CONFIDENTIAL

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USE OF THEIR 700 BLOCKED CARS, FOR WHICH ZAIRE HAS ALREADY BEEN FORCED TO PAY ZAMBIA BETTER THAN \$4 MILLION IN RENT. INSTEAD OF BEING FACED WITH ANY FURTHER DEMANDS FOR THIS TYPE OF PAYMENT ZAIRE WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE RECEIPT OF HARD CURRENCY TRANSIT PAYMENTS FROM ZAMBIA. ALTHOUGH THE ACTUAL AMOUNT OF THESE PAYMENTS WAS THROUGH TO BE SMALL AT THE TIME OF THE CLOSURE OF THE BENGUELA, THIS MAY NOT NOW NECESSARILY BE THE CASE. IN 1973-74 HALF OF ZAMBIA'S TRADE WAS CARRIED OVER THE BENGUELA. CONTINUED CROWDING ON THE TAZARA AND INCREASED COSTS AND BACKLOGS AT DAR ES SALAAM PORT WOULD SEEM TO ARGUE STRONGLY FOR A RAPID ZAMBIAN RETURN TO USE OF THE BENGUELA ON AT LEAST THE SAME SCALE AS BEFORE ONCE THE LINE'S SECURITY CAN BE ESTABLISHED.

6. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ANGOLA/CUBAN FORCES CAN AND WILL ESTABLISH THE SECURITY OF THAT LINE IS UNCLEAR. ALTHOUGH CONTESTED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD IT APPEARS THAT AT PRESENT UNITA FORCES BLOW UP PORTIONS OF THE RAILROAD AT IRREGULAR INTERVALS. PRESUMABLY THE NETO REGIME COULD IMPROVE SECURITY THERE, BUT ONLY AT THE COST OF TYING DOWN MILITARY FORCES WHICH MIGHT BE BETTER EMPLOYED ELSEWHERE. ANOTHER IMPONDERABLE IS THE DEGREE TO WHICH UNITA'S CAPABILITY TO INTERDICT WILL BE REDUCED BY THE LIKELY FUTURE SETTLEMENT OF THE NAMIBIA QUESTION. FINALLY,

ANY SERIOUS ANGOLA/ZAIRIAN ATTEMPT TO USE THE BENGUELA RAILROAD WOULD PRESUMABLY REQUIRE ZAIRE TO CEASE ACTING AS A FUNNEL FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO UNITA. AN END TO THIS ZAIRIAN ROLE WOULD HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON UNIT'S MILITARY CAPABILITIES, INCLUDING ITS ABILITY TO INTERDICT THE RAILWAY. AT THE SAME TIME IT COULD INCREASE UNIT'S POLITICAL INTEREST IN KEEPING THE RAILROAD CLOSED. IN SHORT, STRATEGIC CONDITIONS AND MILITARY CAPABILITIES WILL BE AT LEAST AS IMPORTANT AS ECONOMIC DESIDERATA IN DETERMINING ZAIRIAN/ZAMBIAN USE OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD.

7. ANY OF THE AFOREMENTIONED POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO EITHER ZAIRE OR ZAMBIA WOULD ALSO BE HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON THE CONTINUED EFFICIENT OPERATION OF THE PORT FACILITIES AT LOBITO. PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE THERE WERE SOME 12,000 PORTUGUESE
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RUNNING THE BENGUELA LINE AND LOBITO PORT, MOST OF WHOM HAVE SINCE LEFT. UNDER SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES, BEIRA PORT WENT FROM HANDLING 2,000 MT OF CARGO PER DAY PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE TO AN AVERAGE OF 700-800 MT PER DAY AFTER. THE HIGH DEMURRAGE CHARGES THAT A MAJOR CUT IN HANDLING CAPACITY WOULD ENTAIL MIGHT WELL BE MORE THAN EITHER ZAIRE OR ZAMBIA CAN AFFORD TO SPEND IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE AT THIS TIME. IF ANGOLA FOLLOWS THE PATTERN OF MOZAMBIQUE AND SHARPLY INCREASES THE FREIGHT RATES ON THE BENGUELA THIS MIGHT ALSO CUT INTO ZAIRIAN AND ZAMBIAN USE OF THE LINE.

8. IN SHORT, THE REOPENING OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD COULD BE A MAJOR BLESSING FOR ZAIRE AND ZAMBIA IN POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TERMS, BUT THERE ARE STILL QUESTIONS ABOUT ITS ACTUAL ECONOMIC VALUE THAT ONLY CAN BE ANSWERED ONCE THE LINE IS OPERATING AND SHIPMENTS MOVING IN BOTH DIRECTIONS. WHETHER OR NOT SUCH SHIPMENTS ACTUALLY DO MOVE IN ANY QUANTITY WILL, AMONG OTHER THINGS, BE DEPENDENT ON THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THAT PART OF ANGOLA. IF ALL GOES WELL, REOPENING THE BENGUELA COULD BE A MAJOR BOOST TO ZAIRE'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY, BUT NOT NECESSARILY IN THE SHORT RUN. IT COULD ALSO EASILY PROVE TO BE A BUBBLE OF HOPE THAT BURST.
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